

Message Text

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FOL RPT ATHENS 4455 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO ANKARA, BELGRADE,
BRUSSELS, BUCHAREST, BUDAPEST, MOSCOW, NICOSIA, PRAGUE, SOFIA,
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QUOTE: C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 4455

EXDIS

BRUSSELS FOR USEEC

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, GR, UR

SUBJ: GREEK-SOVIET RELATIONS

REF: (A) ATHENS 1636 (NOTAL) (B) ATHENS 2297 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: DRIVEN BY CONSIDERATIONS OF DOMESTIC AND
FOREIGN POLICY, THE GOG HAS SOUGHT TO IMPROVE RELATIONS
WITH AN APPARENTLY RESERVED MOSCOW. PROGRESS HAS BEEN
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RELATIVELY MODEST, BUT THE GOG HAS EMPHASIZED IT PUBLICLY
DURING THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS. FURTHER, NORMALIZATION IS
A NATURAL DEVELOPMENT DUE TO THE RUDIMENTARY RELATIONSHIP
NOW EXISTING BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. HOWEVER, SINCE THE
PROSPECTS FOR CLOSE TIES APPEAR TO BE SO LIMITED,
WHAT HAS TAKEN PLACE SO FAR SHOULD NOT CAUSE CONCERN ON
OUR PART. END SUMMARY

2. NORMALIZATION OF GREEK RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION HAS BEEN ONE OF THE LESSER, BUT NEVERTHELESS CONSISTENT, THEMES IN THE GOG'S FOREIGN POLICY. THOUGH STILL OVERSHADOWED BY CARAMANLIS' ATTEMPTS TO ORCHESTRATE GREECE'S MEMBERSHIP IN THE WEST, IN RECENT WEEKS THE "OPENING TO THE EAST" HAS PICKED UP NEW VOLUME IN GREECE.

3. THE LONG TERM ELEMENTS BEHIND THE GOG'S EFFORTS TO DEVELOP ITS RUDIMENTARY RELATIONSHIP WITH MOSCOW ARE OBVIOUS:

-- THE EXTENT OF GREEK-SOVIET RELATIONS WERE -- AND ARE -- AT A LEVEL WELL BELOW THAT PREVAILING BETWEEN MOSCOW AND MOST OTHER WESTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES.

-- THE SOVIET UNION IS INEVITABLY A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN, AND THE GOG MUST ESPECIALLY TAKE IT INTO ACCOUNT AT A TIME WHEN THE AREA IS SO UNSETTLED. THE GOG, BELIEVING THE RUSSIANS PREFER TURKEY OVER GREECE, WOULD, HOWEVER, LIKE TO INTRODUCE SOME INCENTIVES FOR GREATER BALANCE IN SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS THE TWO COUNTRIES.

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-- THE OPPOSITION TO CARAMANLIS HAS HARPED ON THE GOVERNMENT'S ALLEGED FAILURE TO EXPLORE THE DIPLOMATIC AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES OF A MOSCOW CONNECTION. PAPANDREOU, FOR EXAMPLE, HAS SUGGESTED THAT THE USSR IS PRO-TURKISH BECAUSE GREEK FOREIGN POLICY GIVES IT NO OTHER CHOICE.

-- A CONTINUING INTEREST IN THE WELFARE OF THE GREEK COMMUNITY LIVING IN THE USSR.

4. SO FAR AS WE CAN TELL, THE USSR HAS REACTED TO THE GREEK'S DESIRES FOR NORMALIZATION WITH SOME RESTRAINT. CARAMANLIS, FOR EXAMPLE, HAS STATED PUBLICLY THAT IF GREEK-SOVIET RELATIONS HAVE NOT EVOLVED FURTHER, "THE FAULT DOES NOT LIE WITH THE GREEK SIDE." AND ALTHOUGH THERE HAS BEEN PROGRESS TOWARDS NORMALIZATION, IT HAS BEEN SLUGGISH -- PARTICULARLY WHEN COMPARED TO SOVIET-TURKISH RELATIONS WHERE THE SOVIET UNION APPEARS TO BE AN ACTIVE SUITOR.

5. BUT THERE HAS BEEN PROGRESS:

-- A SERIES OF HIGH LEVEL VISITS HAS BEEN PROGRAMMED. THE PRECISE SCHEDULE OF THE VISITS SEEMS TO HAVE TAKEN AN OBNORMALLY LONG TIME TO FIX, BUT IT NOW APPEARS THAT FOREIGN MINISTER RALLIS WILL TRAVEL TO MOSCOW SOMETIME IN JULY; ACCORDING TO SOVIET DIPLOMATS HERE FOREIGN MINISTER GROMYKO WILL PAY A RETURN VISIT TO ATHENS IN NOVEMBER; AND A TRIP TO MOSCOW IS BEING CONSIDERED FOR CARAMANLIS LATER THIS YEAR OR EARLY 1979. IT IS A COMMENT ON THE STATE OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES THAT THESE EXCHANGES REPORTEDLY ARE THE FIRST IN THIS CENTURY.

-- THE TWO GOVERNMENTS RENEWED THEIR ECONOMIC AGREEMENT, CONFIDENTIAL

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INITIALED A CONSULAR CONVENTION, AND ARE NEGOTIATING A NEW CULTURAL AGREEMENT.

-- TRADE, WHILE STILL COMPARATIVELY INSIGNIFICANT IN TERMS OF OVERALL GREEK FOREIGN TRADE AND INVESTMENT, HAS RISEN AND THE GREEKS ARE LOOKING FOR FURTHER TRADE OPPORTUNITIES.

-- THE TWO COUNTRIES WILL EXCHANGE NEVAL SHIP VISITS THIS FALL FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE WORLD WAR II.

6. EVEN IN THE ABSENCE OF GREATER PROGRESS, THE GOG IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS HAS SOUGHT TO GIVE THE APPEARANCE OF MOVING SMARTLY AHEAD IN ITS RELATIONS WITH MOSCOW, DRIVEN BY SUCH FACTORS AS PAPANDREOU'S RECENT ATTACKS ON GOG'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS MOSCOW, THE EMBARGO DECISION, PUBLICITY SURROUNDING ECEVIT'S DEALINGS WITH MOSCOW, AND THE WASHINGTON NATO SUMMIT. THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO WAS PROVIDED BY THE VISITS TO ATHENS RECENTLY OF A. CHERNIENKO, ALTERNATE MEMBER AND SECRETARY OF THE POLITBURO; IGNATIY T, NOVIKOW, DEPUTY CHAIRMAN USSR COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, AND SOVIET VICE MINISTER OF INTERIOR SHUMELIN. CHERNIENKO TRAVELED TO GREECE TO ATTEND THE 10TH CONGRESS OF THE GREEK COMMUNIST PARTY; NOVIKOV AND SHUMELIN, AS MEMBERS OF THE SOVIET DELEGATION TO THE ATHENS MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE.

7. THE GOG CHOSE TO LAVISH SOME ATTENTION AND CONSIDERABLE PUBLICITY ON ALL THREE MEN. FOR EXAMPLE, SHUMELIN, WHO APPARENTLY IS IN CHARGE OF SECURITY FOR THE MOSCOW GAMES, MET WITH GREEK POLICE OFFICIALS AND THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC ORDER. CHERNIENKO MET WITH CARAMANLIS AND RALLIS. ALL THE GOG'S NEWS OUTLETS GAVE WIDE PLAY TO THESE EVENTS, OBVIOUSLY SEEKING CONFIDENTIAL

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TO SPREAD THE IMPRESSION THAT THE TEMPO OF GREEK-SOVIET RELATIONS IS PICKING UP.

8. IN FACT, THE SOVIETS DID NOT SEEM TO HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY ALTERED THEIR POSTURE ON THE PACE AND DIRECTION OF GREEK-SOVIET RELATIONS. CHERNIENKO, WHO DID MOST OF THE TALKING IN PUBLIC, STUCK POLITELY TO STANDARD SOVIET THEMES. HE WAS ESPECIALLY CIRCUMSPECT WHEN TURKEY WAS RAISED. SO FAR AS WE CAN TELL TODAY, ABOUT THE ONLY NEW DEPARTURE IS THE PLAN, IF IT MATERIALIZES, FOR GROMYKO TO COME TO ATHENS.

9. AT THIS POINT, BOTH MOSCOW AND ATHENS MUST BE FAIRLY PLEASED WITH DEVELOPMENTS THE SOVIETS NO DOUBT ARE PARTICULARLY SATISFIED. THOUGH THEY HAVE GAINED ALMOST NOTHING TO GREECE, A COUNTRY WHERE THEY HAVE LONG BEEN A BETE NOIRE, CARAMANLIS' CONSERVATIVE, PRO-WESTERN GOVERNMENT IS ASSUMING THE INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE BILATERAL RELATIONS, FOR ITS PART, THE GOG IS BLUNTING A POTENTIAL LEFTIST OPPOSITION ISSUE.

10. IN EVALUATING ALL THIS FROM THE USG PERSPECTIVE, THERE IS NO REASON TO BE ALARMED:

-- THE SOVIET THEME IS AND SHOULD REMAIN A RELATIVELY MINOR ONE IN GREEK FOREIGN RELATIONS, DEVELOPMENTS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE SO FAR BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES ARE TO BE EXPECTED, ESPECIALLY GIVEN THE VERY LOW LEVEL OF PAST TIES. CARAMANLIS IS FIRMLY FIXED ON ANCHORING HIS COUNTRY IN THE WEST AND IS MOVING GREECE IN THAT DIRECTION ON ALL FRONTS. AND HE KNOWS THAT COMPARED TO TURKEY, GREECE HAS RELATIVELY LITTLE TO OFFER THE SOVIETS.

-- WHILE OTHER ADDRESSEES ARE IN A BETTER POSITION TO EVALUATE SOVIET INTENTIONS, FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE IT SEEMS THE USSR IS PLAYING FOR TURKISH STAKES AND THUS WILL CONTINUE TO MOVE DELIBERATELY IN ITS RELATIONS WITH
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GREECE.

11. DEPT PLEASE PASS USCINCEUR, USNMR SHAPE, AND USDOCOSOUTH FOR INFO MCCLOSKEY UNQUOTE VANCE

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